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ABSTRACT

At the University of California, Riverside, a structured, formal adjunct program coordinated with large introductory courses has been developed to improve students' reading and study skills. The program uses adjunct instructors who are specialists in reading and study skills and who are familiar with the content areas. Skills taught include time management, efficient textbook reading, note taking from texts and lectures, and test reviewing and taking. During the 1978-79 academic year adjunct courses were taken by 496 students in biology, black studies, Chicano studies, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Chemistry and religious studies adjuncts were requested for the 1979-80 academic year. Evaluations from faculty and students indicate that the program is effective in improving study skills, grade performance, and academic progress during the quarter. (DF)

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PIGGYBACKING READING AND STUDY SKILLS ONTO COLLEGE COURSES

Patrick J. Moran

Since at least 1916, attempts have been made to improve the reading and study skills of college students. (Enright, 1975) And even though widespread acceptance of reading and learning centers is comparatively recent, there is nothing terribly innovative about teaching these skills per se.

What is innovative is the vehicle used to teach these basic skills. Most college reading specialists perceive the problems inherent in a developmental reading course which is removed from the student's on-going academic course work. This paper will describe an attempt to incorporate reading and study skills into the academic life of students.

Attempting to improve those reading and study skills that college students appear to need is not an easy task. The many obstacles that prevent such attempts must be met with ingenuity and energy.

Obstacle 1. College students have no need to improve their reading and study skills.

Solution. This statement is heard very frequently and it is based on the assumption that reading and study skills are mechanical acts which can be mastered at an early age. But the reality is that these skills are developmental and can be enriched and advanced throughout formal schooling. Chaplin provides a good rationale for improving reading skills when she says, "A college curriculum includes higher level concepts and skills which are peculiar to the content to be covered. Therefore, learning experiences in reading, provided to enhance the growth of all students, are not remedial, but developmental in the sense that movement is the sole criterion. Reading is a necessary concomitant to all academic instruction and must be woven

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carefully into the curriculum fabric." (Chaplin, 1978)

An even stronger case can be made for study skills because most students have had no formal instruction in this area by the time they are college freshmen and have little idea of how to manage their time, take notes, memorize data, and review for tests. The conclusion is that there should be some way to improve the developmental reading and study skills of college students.

Obstacle 2. Few college instructors have training in improving reading and study skills.

Solution. College professors are hired because of their expertise in a scholarly area; it is not reasonable to expect a professor to be knowledgeable in reading and study skills as well. Therefore, one solution is to acquire a resource person competent to teach reading and study skills to assist the professor. It is helpful for that resource person to have a working knowledge of the instructor's field of study.

Obstacle 3. The demands of most courses are such that class time cannot be used to teach reading and study skills.

Solution. Any effective skills program will prove to be lengthy enough that it should be conducted apart from class time. (Although there are also many valuable contributions any instructor can made within the class, such as, taking a few minutes to discuss how to study for the exam or what to look for while reading a particular chapter.)

Obstacle 4. The abilities of college students are so diverse that any one program or approach will not be effective with all students.

Solution. Many students do come to college with serious skills deficiencies. The best solution would be to assume that students enter college

without serious problems, but since that is not realistic, students with skills problems of a remedial nature should have some type of special support until they can overcome their deficiencies.

Obstacle 5. Many students either lack interest or are unaware of the benefit of improving reading and study skills.

Solution. Students will do things they perceive are in their own best interests, just like the rest of us. So coordinating a reading and study skills program with a particular course can create more interest through immediate application.

Another way to promote interest is to have the instructor's support. If a professor says that a particular activity is worthwhile and can be beneficial, students will be more inclined to participate.

Finally, any program that intends to improve college reading and study skills should be effective enough to show tangible results. Once students start promoting a program among their friends, the success of the program is assured.

The program that overcomes all these obstacles at the University of California, Riverside is called the Adjunct Program. It has been operational for six years and is now the major vehicle to deliver reading and study skills to our campus.

The Adjunct is a structured, formal program coordinated with a particular course, designed to teach reading and study skills to groups of college students. Thus students in an entry level sociology course, for instance, can participate in an adjunct which will concentrate on how to take notes, read the text efficiently, and prepare for tests specifically for that

class.

This program is most successful when it is offered in large, entry-level courses in which students have been known to experience difficulty. A large class is necessary to attract enough students to justify the time spent by the adjunct instructor. Entry level courses seem to be more successful because students have not had a chance to learn "bad habits" in that particular discipline, and they tend to be a fairly homogeneous group. Also, concentrating on difficult courses helps attract more interest and provides a more definite focus to the adjunct program.

The adjunct instructor has a double job because it is essential that he or she attend all the class sessions and teach the adjunct program. Going to the class without fail assures that the study skills are realistic and applicable. It also makes the adjunct instructor highly visible and accessible to the students. This person must have a solid grounding in reading and study skills, especially as those skills pertain to a college setting. The primary function of the adjunct instructor is to assess the demands of the course and then present the skills which students would need to be effective in the course. Without a good knowledge of the different techniques available in improving reading and study skills, the adjunct instructor cannot provide the right assistance, and the program will suffer. So, it is usually more important that the adjunct instructor be a specialist in reading and study skills than in the specific content area.

There is one important exception to that last statement, however, which occurs in working with science courses. As courses become more technical, it becomes increasingly necessary that the adjunct instructor have a good background in the content area, a condition usually present in the sciences. In chemistry, for example, it is necessary to have a working

knowledge of the algebraic demands peculiar to chemistry because working with chemical formulas is an area in which most students encounter difficulties. So for a chemistry adjunct, the instructor will spend some time early in the program helping students determine if they have the algebraic skills needed and also demonstrating to students successful ways to approach chemical formulas.

In addition to the knowledge needed in reading, study skills and the content area, the adjunct instructor must have a clear idea of the nature of the adjunct program, which is best stated in terms of what it is not. First, it is not tutoring. Content area professors become suspicious of learning center personnel at the slightest hint that the study skills specialist is teaching any of the content, and rightly so. If a student does not understand the content, then the student should consult with the course instructor or seek a qualified tutor. Second, the adjunct program is not individual study skills counseling. The adjunct is a group program, and the more it remains a group function, the better the chance that interaction and discussion as a group will take place. Because the adjunct instructor has to attend lectures as well as prepare and present sessions, the program is not efficient unless it is a group situation. The adjunct instructor will spend at least five hours a week with the adjunct, so the adjunct must attract enough students to justify the time spent. Third, the adjunct program is not remedial. The program is geared to the demands and pace of an academic course, so the movement in the adjunct program is rapid, and there is not time to assist students with serious deficiencies. It is, therefore, essential that an adjunct program have a support service to which to refer students with serious problems.

The content of the adjunct program is flexible and can be adjusted

to meet the requests of the instructor and students in the course. There are some topics that are "standard" in that just about every course requires certain similar skills from students. These standard topics and comments on each are listed below.

Time Management. Students are asked to assess the course demands, how they use their time at that point. They then draw up a study schedule designed to meet the demands of their courses by making the most efficient use of study time. The schedule is checked periodically and revised after the middle of the school term.

Reading Textbooks Efficiently. Early in the quarter, the adjunct instructor and students examine the text and analyze the difficulties encountered in reading it. They discuss the organization of the text, non-print aids, and what the professor expects the students to know from the text. The SQ3R method of study is explained and applied to the text. Students bring in their text regularly to discuss progress. Since most courses require a good deal of reading, this topic tends to be a recurring theme in the adjunct.

Underlining and Other Note-taking Strategies. The emphasis here is on thinking through the concepts presented and making a conscious decision to underline or note only that material crucial to understanding. We find most students underline mechanically, with little thought to what or why, and they underline either too much or too little.

Taking Lecture Notes. This skill seems to be the one for which students are least prepared. The advantage of the adjunct program becomes apparent when teaching this skill because the note-taking methods are related specifically to a particular lecturer, and the examples and practice are immediate and realistic.

Reviewing for Tests. Because the adjunct instructor takes part in the course, it is easy to remind the students when it is appropriate to start reviewing, and to demonstrate practical ways to review. A valuable exercise has been to ask students to list and discuss practice test questions throughout the quarter.

Test Taking Techniques and Practice Tests. The adjunct instructor discusses how to take tests and what pitfalls to avoid after which time students are given a practice test. This activity is scheduled a week to ten days before the actual mid-term and final. In this way, students can determine how well prepared they are for the exam and learn the importance of avoiding common mistakes, such as misreading directions or negative questions. The practice or mock exams are the most popular part of the adjunct program. We often hear that our mock exams are passed on to students who are not in the adjunct, but who use them as a method of test review.

The adjunct program changes to meet course needs. Thus, when a course features essay examinations, there is a concentration on writing and how to prepare for essay exams. Experts in writing may be asked to take part in those sessions. Science and math courses call for considerable changes in the syllabus. Typically, students need to be aware that these courses will take up more of their time and call for quite a different style of note-taking and reading. The immediate goal is to enhance the ability of students to be successful in the course, so the adjunct instructors are always prepared to adapt to the course demands thus increasing the effectiveness of the adjunct.

The goal of the adjunct program is to assure that the reading and

study skills of students are sufficient for them to meet all their academic goals. So as the adjunct course proceeds, the instructor emphasizes that the skills taught are transferable, and that the course includes all those skills considered necessary to become a successful student. Fortunately, most of the reading and study skills presented in any adjunct are applicable to a wide range of academic areas. If a student is a good note-taker in one class, he or she will find that skill valuable in every lecture class.

----A FOOTNOTE----

The Learning and Study Skills Center of California, Riverside, has been offering adjunct programs for six years. During 1978-79, adjuncts were offered in both major and non-major beginning biology, black studies, Chicano studies, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Four-hundred ninty-six students took part in the adjunct program. It should be pointed out that not all adjuncts were successful, usually because the course itself was more advanced and therefore students did not need (or feel they needed) this supplemental help, or it was impossible to schedule the adjunct at a time convenient to a majority of interested students. For 1979-80 we have requests from instructors to offer adjuncts in beginning chemistry and religious studies, as well as the areas listed previously.

The adjunct program has been evaluated in several ways. The fact that faculty request the program is a positive comment on its value. In addition, faculty comments have been solicited, and those comments have been favorable. Students who participate in adjuncts are routinely asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. A large majority of the students rate the program as excellent and feel they have improved their study skills and

their standing in the class. The program is also evaluated in terms of grade improvement. The final grades of students who participate in the adjunct program are compared to final grades of students in the same class who did not take an adjunct. In some cases, final grades for students in the adjunct were higher.

A more significant pattern can be seen in a comparison of adjunct and non-adjunct students who received a grade of C- or less. The difference here was striking. Students who participated in the adjunct had a much smaller percentage of lower grades--only about 10% of the adjunct students had grades of less than C-.

A final means of evaluation is a comparison of progress over the quarter. In the Biology sequence, which contains the largest number of adjunct participants, students are given a series of four tests. When those results are examined, we have found that adjunct participants showed a greater degree of improvement than the total class. Our conclusion is that participation in the adjunctprogram will help to insure that students will be successful in the academic class.

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